

Minutes of School Committee Meeting with the Committee on Appropriations 04/02/2014

A meeting of the Barrington School Committee and the Barrington Committee on Appropriations was held on Wednesday, April 2, 2014, in the Senior Center, Barrington Public Library. The School Committee was called to order by Mrs. Brody at 7:00 p.m. and present were Mrs. Brody, Dr. Dominguez, Mr. Guida and Dr. Shea. Mr. Fuller was absent. Mr. Messore and Mr. Tarro joined the School Committee for the joint meeting. Committee on Appropriations (COA) members Chair Tim Sweetser, Geoff Grove, Peter Clifford, Joel Hellman and Chad Mollica were in attendance, as was Town Council Liaison to the COA Ann Strong.

After taking care of some housekeeping issues, the meeting turned to a discussion of the zero based budget approach taken to develop the Barrington Public Schools proposed 2014-2015 operating budget and the budget's key cost drivers. Mr. Messore and Mr. Tarro pointed to the changes in the language arts and mathematics curricula that have taken place and the expansion of technology in the schools, both of which correspond to the roll out of the Common Core State Standards. The proposed 2014-2015 budget also reflects the inclusion of All Day Kindergarten, and Mr. Guida indicated that this year has been difficult for many kindergarten students because of the schools' existing half-day structure. The School Committee members in attendance voiced their full support for the 2014-2015 budget as presented for review by the COA.

In response to Peter Clifford's report from March 7, School Administration emailed a reconciliation of the Town Audited Financial report to historical budget documents to both committees.

Members of the COA posed questions. Mr. Peter Clifford introduced an updated Municipal Comparison Document, including municipal and school budget data, that he compiled from multiple data sources for reference. COA members also presented their ideas for potential cost savings in the schools (e.g., elimination of textbooks and charging for transportation). School officials provided clarification that those items are mandated under Rhode Island General Laws. Discussion continued on how the process for developing the school budget might be strengthened (e.g., by including the school district in the town's Capital Improvement Planning process). COA members expressed concern over the teacher contract (as salaries and benefits represent 87% of the budget) and escalating health and pension costs.

Mr. Grove questioned assumptions for the five-year budget forecast presented in the school budget, especially administration and principal salaries that were at zero percent increases. Mr. Tarro explained that the assumptions made for that category was the result of recommendations from the Budget Forecast Committee. Changes to the assumption can be included upon future recommendation from the Forecast Committee.

Mrs. Brody noted the significant reduction in Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) obligation for the Barrington Public Schools, from \$21 million to \$7 million, as a result of changes in plan design eligibility requirements.

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Mr. Messore and Mr. Tarro reported that there have been ongoing collaborative discussions, beginning with Town Manager Peter DeAngelis and former Town Financial Director Dean Huff, on that topic and that initial work relative to the consolidation of municipal and school file servers in a agreed to designated location in the Town Hall has been completed now.

Other issues that were discussed included class size, the potential impact of All Day Kindergarten on district enrollment and facilities, the presence of surpluses in the school budget over the past several years, and shared interest in evaluating programs to direct money appropriately. The discussion ended with an observation by an audience member, Mr. Ed McKinley, who stated that senior citizens in town may not be able to afford an increase in taxes.

Dr. Dominguez moved and Mr. Guida seconded the motion that the School Committee adjourn its meeting at 8:45 pm. The motion passed 4-0 with Mrs. Brody, Dr. Dominguez, Dr. Shea and Mr. Guida voting in the affirmative for the motion.